

Cajun is dead – Long live Cajun: Shifting from a linguistic to a cultural community

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have reported an evolution or change in progress in the Cajun identity, though their intuitions have not been confirmed empirically. The traditional membership borders of what a community consists of no longer apply in the case of Cajun. In order to understand these questions of identity and belonging, and to scientifically control the interpretation of the linguistic behavior of Cajun speakers, a general survey has been conducted on the linguistic attitudes and cultural identity of a sample of 929 individuals stratified by age and sex from four communities. Our results show that Cajun identity rests fundamentally in the linguistic ability of the speakers, regardless of the age group one is in: the more one has access to the Cajun language, the more one self-identifies as Cajun. In general, respondents claim that the necessary criteria to be considered Cajun are just those criteria that they themselves satisfy. We will demonstrate that there appear to be several 'paths' to take insofar as the Cajun community identity in Louisiana is concerned. However, this segmentation obviously has not been established or maintained without creating considerable tension between members of the cultural Cajun community.

KEYWORDS: Cajun French, attitudes, culture, minority, community, self-identification, ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

The dispersion of the Cajun population in Louisiana, U.S.A., its advanced stage of assimilation in some areas, and longstanding negative attitudes toward the use of the Cajun language by both members and non-members alike have made the community impossible to delimit solely on the basis of such criteria such as race, religion, ancestry, region or surname. Even at the geographic level, Cajun regions or parishes are not clearly distinguished from other francophone regions, including those of Creole heritage (Estaville 1987). Though there are heavy concentrations of Cajun speakers in certain towns, the criterion of locale is not totally reliable, since Cajuns are

interspersed with members of other linguistic communities. There exists no single definition of the 'Cajun Community' acceptable to all researchers. For many, the Cajun collectivity includes only descendants of the Acadians deported from Nova Scotia, others argue that it encompasses any white person of francophone origin, and still others claim that it also includes Creole speakers as well as immigrants (Germans, Italians, etc.) who have assimilated to the culture.

Labov (1966, 1969, 1972a, 1972b) showed that a speech community is defined through the sharing of a set of linguistic norms and values, as much as through any homogeneous usage of forms and elements. Hymes added that members of a speech community share strong feelings of belonging to a local territory and of participating in an interactional network inside this territory (Hymes 1972, 1974; Milroy 1980). Several sociolinguistic studies have demonstrated the validity and usefulness of these definitional criteria, especially for diglossic and unstable communities (Blom and Gumperz 1972, Gal 1979, Dorian 1981).

Dorian (1981) mentions the self-perception criterion as a necessary and sufficient condition for establishing membership in a community undergoing a shift process. Though the borders of the community may coincide with cultural distinctions of language, religion, etc., individuals' feelings of belonging are primary. Even though the self-perception criterion can only be operationalized via self-reports, when it is combined with other criteria such as network membership, expressed norms and values, and linguistic ability, this yields a useful tool in analyzing speech communities. Utilizing these criteria in combination will allow access to the range of variability of individuals' perceptions of their own membership and, by extension, a determination of what constitutes the Cajun community today in Louisiana.

Many researchers have reported an evolution or a change in progress of Cajun identity, although these intuitions have not been confirmed empirically. Many speakers who have only a passive competence in the language identify themselves as Cajun; others claim to belong to the community by virtue of their genealogy or cultural heritage though they do not speak French; some individuals even identify themselves as Cajun despite lacking both Cajun ancestry and linguistic ability in Cajun French, claiming that everyone living in South Louisiana is to some extent Cajun. Several people base the delimitation of the Cajun community on a certain attitude toward life (Cajun is *la joie de vivre*) or, more humorously, on culinary qualifications (a true Cajun is someone who can look at a rice field and tell you how many servings of gumbo it will yield).

In order to realize that the traditional borders of a community no longer apply in the case of Cajun, one only needs to leaf through tourist brochures (in which every restaurant serves authentic Cajun food, every Cajun town is the original Acadian settlement), and to recognize the new politically correct rhetoric about Cajun identity. Nowadays the (in)famous *Thibodeaux and Bou-*

dreaux jokes – in which two hunters or trappers are taken advantage of – have changed considerably. Cajun jokes are less funny now that Cajun identity encompasses almost everybody. It is fashionable nowadays to be Cajun.

A better understanding of these questions of identity and belonging can be achieved by the examination not only of the values and attitudes of people of Cajun ancestry, but also of those individuals from other ethnic groups who live in the same areas. The correlation of the perceptions of these groups with social factors, geographic factors, and an index of Linguistic Ability and Cajun Background (LAB) is also proposed. The results obtained will help determine the extent to which the Cajun community constitutes a collectivity distinct from mainstream American society. Are there in fact two paths to the survival of the Cajun community in Louisiana? Does there exist a Cajun French speech community which maintains, albeit tenuously, the French language; or is there solely the survival of the Cajun *culture* in which community members neither speak the language nor consider it a crucial aspect of identity? If this last hypothesis is the case, the implication is that the preservation of Cajun French is not vital to the survival of the culture.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Between 1764 and 1786, thousands of Acadians exiled from Nova Scotia established settlements in Louisiana. The modern-day manifestation of this dialect descended from the French of the Acadians – commonly called Cajun French – manifests features of the language of the Oïl region in southwestern France, particularly Poitou and Saintonge. Its linguistic system resembles that of other non-standard varieties of French in North America (excepting French Creoles), especially Acadian French to which it is the most closely related. Geographic isolation and increased contact with other languages, however, have led to the development of distinct phonological, morphological and syntactic characteristics (Western 1973, Marshall 1982). Cajun French is not a creole, in which the mixed language of a generation of speakers has become a first language for the following generation, nor is it a pidgin. It has of course been influenced by English and other Louisiana French varieties, especially at the lexical level. In contrast with Louisiana Creole French, which is a language with African, Caribbean, Spanish and English elements, Cajun French is for the most part mutually comprehensible with other French varieties.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Cajun community had emerged as a fully articulated ethnic group (Dormon 1983). Ascriptive factors were essential in maintaining the Cajun community as a homogeneous entity. The Cajun people were distinct from mainstream Anglo-Americans in many ways: they had a distinct religion (Catholic), language (Cajun French), cuisine (Acadian cuisine adapted to the environment in Louisiana: fish, seafood, wild game, etc.), and pastimes ('fais do do', etc.). The majority of Cajuns had

established themselves in the more isolated interior areas of the colony made available to them, evolving a system of community structure based on a 'closed corporate neighborhood' involving 'extended kin groups' (Waddell 1991). One other factor cited by researchers which helped shape the community was the Cajun readiness to absorb other ethnic elements. Although an overwhelming majority of Cajuns married other Cajuns, a few married Germans, Irish, Spanish, and non-Acadian Francophones, i.e. Creole, French and Caribbean people who were subsequently integrated into the Cajun subculture.

Cajuns were also separated from the mainstream Anglo-American culture by virtue of their 'relative lack of politico-economic power' (Dormon 1983). Although a small elite succeeded in becoming wealthy land-owners, slave-owners, planter/merchants and professionals (Dormon calls this minority the 'Genteel Acadian'), the majority of Cajuns were 'bayou country or prairie small farmers, swamp fishermen and shrimpers and oystermen of the coastal area'. Inevitably, their modest economic level combined with their distinctive way of life (alien and disturbing to unenlightened outsiders) came to signify an inferior social status. 'In addition to the obvious matters of identifying the Cajuns by their linguistic, religious, and family surname distinctions, "Cajun" also implied such qualities as poverty, insularity, illiteracy, social inferiority (and) the absence of culture' (Dormon 1983: 240). Cajuns were also described as lazy, unambitious, cliquish, and simple-minded.

The Cajun community retained its coherence throughout the period before the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century. The non-French population in Louisiana, however, was significantly augmented after Louisiana was purchased by the U.S. in 1803 and a state constitutional convention in 1845 upheld the rights of Anglo-Americans to the detriment of other linguistic groups. In spite of the vitality of small Cajun communities, and in spite of the presence of other Francophone groups – colonists from France, a large Creole population in New Orleans and French Caribbean slaves on plantations – a process of assimilation had begun. Usage of Cajun French began to decline slowly but surely; the nonstandard status and the low prestige that it was accorded accelerated the process.

Urbanization and industrialization at the beginning of the 20th century (Newton 1929, Dormon 1983, Brasseaux 1987, 1992, Smith 1992) transformed the homogeneous Cajun community. Factors such as the construction of railroads around 1880, commerce via steamboats in the bayous, the First and Second World Wars, the expansion of the petroleum industries in Texas and Louisiana, the construction of a network of roads instituted by governor Huey Long, the passage of Act 27 of the Louisiana legislature in 1916 which made education obligatory in the state, and the rural electrification program administered by the federal government affected the community. These developments made it possible for Cajuns to escape their poverty,

to find better-paying jobs and to provide their children with educational advantages.

These economic and social processes furthered assimilation into the Anglo-dominant culture and had correspondingly negative consequences for the vigor of the Cajun language. They were reinforced by the legislation of 1921 which established English as the only official language in Louisiana (thereby relegating Cajun French to the status of an ‘illegal’ language and converting the educational system and religious activities from French to English, Brown 1993). The relatively stable networks which constituted Cajun communities began to change. Inexorably, English replaced French, even at home, because it became less and less of an advantage to use and preserve French. Moreover, Cajuns began to perceive French as a severe handicap to socio-economic advancement, English being dominant in the political and commercial domains. Finally, for many Cajuns, shifting from Cajun French to English was a way to attenuate the traditional stigmatization towards themselves and, especially, their children.

In the progressive era at the end of the 1960s, a series of laws seeking to preserve the French language in Louisiana set the stage for the creation of CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana). At about the same time, a number of activists convinced of the importance of French in Louisiana and of propagating Cajun culture founded a series of organizations, each concerned with one particular aspect of preservation. The initiatives undertaken by CODOFIL and other advocates have been important components in what researchers have labeled the Cajun renaissance, ostensibly resulting in a new positive attitude towards the French cultural heritage. It is unknown, however, to what extent this movement has contributed to the emergence of these attitudes. We do know that the creation of CODOFIL was the continuation of a former political revival movement, albeit with much higher visibility and accompanying pomp and circumstance. As Ancelet notes, some political leaders were considered ‘the glowing embers of the Cajun cultural revival’, such as Dudley LeBlanc, ‘a champion of Acadian ethnicity since the 1930s who used the 1955 bicentennial of the Acadian exile as a rallying point for the revitalization of ethnicity among the Cajuns’ (Ancelet 1988: 345). The exhortations of this group, however, touched a chord only among the Cajun ‘elite’ and ‘were consistently hampered by an inability to organize or even reach the populations’ (Ancelet 1988: 345).

Today, many people claim that the linguistic reality and daily life of the Cajuns are completely disconnected from the purely symbolic renaissance discourse of the elite. They argue that the decline of Cajun French is inevitable given the degree of assimilation that has already been reached. The oldest may have French as their mother tongue, but many of their children never use it. A number of young adults and adolescents have some knowledge of French as a second language but the majority of them learned the

school-taught variety (standard French) rather than Cajun French, and they do not speak it among themselves. The 1990 Census Bureau data for Louisiana show that, out of a total population of 3,494,359, only 261,678 people claim to speak French at home. The way the language question is formulated, however, leaves no way to distinguish between the varying degrees of Cajun French fluency, how often it is used, or which of the various types of French is spoken in the home, i.e. Cajun French, Creole French or standard French. It can be hypothesized that the actual number of fluent Cajun French speakers is much smaller than the Census Bureau data indicate.

HYPOTHESES

Tajfel (1978) suggested that a person's social identity derives from his or her own membership in a group, and further posited that individuals maintain valued differences in the ingroup in comparison to relevant outgroups in order to achieve distinctiveness. Based on the notion that 'ingroup behavior is mediated by individuals' social representations of the intergroup situation they find themselves in' (Harwood et al. 1994), the approach of Giles and his associates (1977, 1990), states that 'group members' subjective assessment of ingroup/outgroup vitality may be as important in determining socio-linguistic and interethnic behaviour as the group's objective vitality' (Harwood et al. 1994: 175).

It would be reasonable to expect that the linguistic and cultural assimilation processes which prevailed for many decades, combined with the more recent renaissance of Cajun identity, would change the traditional boundary markers of the Cajun community. It is not really known, however, to what extent these processes have affected traditional definitions. Some researchers suggest that the rapid shift from French to English within the Cajun community has blurred social boundaries. Because bilingual speakers constantly shift back and forth to suit communication needs, simple langauge-based criteria of what a Cajun is are no longer valid. Others argue that the community has become so diffuse that is almost impossible to come up with clear criteria. Dормон (1983) claims that it is necessary to analyze the Cajun ethnogenesis in terms of class distinctions, and that this distinction continues to play a role in Cajun maintenance.

The goals of this study are to determine what types of individuals identify themselves as Cajuns and what, if any, are the objective indices of a 'true' Cajun identity. Although the Cajun renaissance has led to a superficial redefinition of the Cajun community as including almost everyone in South Louisiana, another hypothesis is that the Cajun community is less diffuse than many think, and that its boundaries, albeit involving a wide 'grey zone', are revealed by the self-definition of its members and the neighbors with whom they live. Do these two contrasting conceptions of the Cajun community coexist in the attitudes and beliefs of the community itself? One

would be a language-based community corresponding to the traditional sociolinguistic speech community. This vision is unlikely to persist, as evidenced by the tendency of younger speakers to relax the criteria pertaining to French and degree of ability in French. The other would be a cultural community primarily based on Acadian ancestry. Could this dichotomy be more closely related to socio-cultural factors such as the index of Linguistic Ability and Cajun Background than to socioeconomic class?

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand these questions of identity and belonging, and to scientifically control the interpretation of the linguistic behavior of Cajun speakers, a general survey has been conducted on the linguistic attitudes and cultural identity of a sample of 1,440 individuals from the four communities. The values and attitudes of Cajuns as well as those of other individuals who live in the same areas have been examined.

Stratified sample

The sample of 1,440 individuals stratified by age and sex represents four Cajun communities (Figure 1), 360 individuals per community: Thibodaux (LaFourche Parish), Abbeville (Vermillion Parish), Eunice (St. Landry Parish) and Marksville (Avoyelles Parish). Place of residence has been considered as a social factor in the sociolinguistic analysis. The choice of communities was based on several selection criteria:

1. These communities are in regions that according to the 1990 U.S. census contain the largest number of individuals who claim to speak French at home (Vermillion Parish 38%, Avoyelles Parish 28%, LaFourche 26%, St. Landry Parish 25%).
2. Each of the towns (10,000 inhabitants or more, except Marksville) contains the largest number of Caucasians who say they speak French at home (Thibodaux 12%, Abbeville 26%, Eunice 34%, and Marksville 43%).
3. They contain a large proportion of individuals claiming Acadian ancestry (Thibodaux 20%, Abbeville 27%, Marksville 28%, Eunice 40%).
4. They offer sample coverage of the geographic diversity of Cajun French.
5. They differ among themselves with respect to social and economic levels: mean salary, poverty levels among white families, unemployment rates, residential property values, average education, rural versus urban employment, etc. (Thibodaux is the most prosperous, followed by Abbeville, Eunice is third and Marksville is relatively poor).
6. They range from largely rural to more urbanized areas (Thibodaux and Eunice have higher population concentrations, Abbeville and Marksville less so).

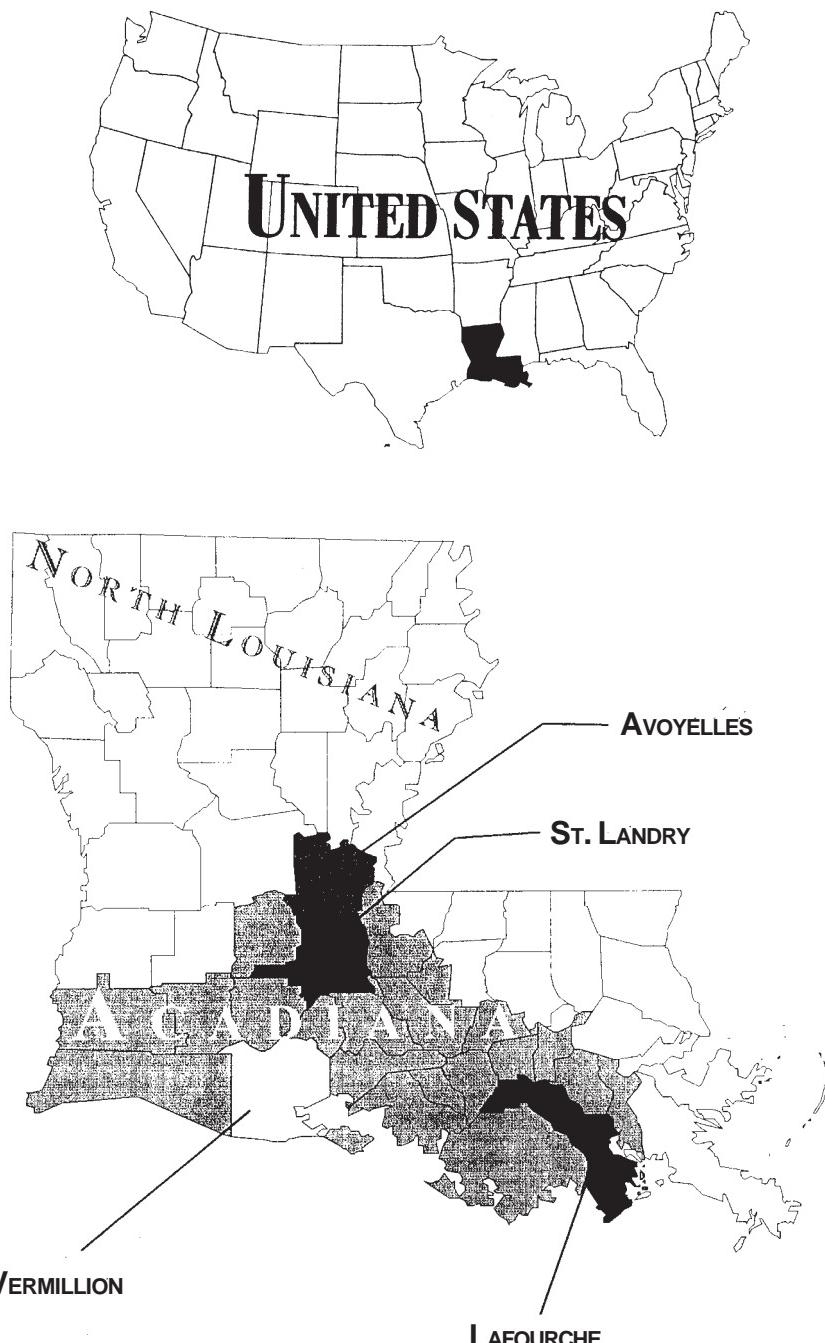


Figure 1: Acadiana

Table 1: The Cajun stratified sample

| Factors | Eunice | Marksville | Abbeville | Thibodaux | Total |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Women 20/39 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Women 40/59 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Women 60+ | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Subtotal | 180 | 180 | 180 | 180 | 720 |
| Men 20/39 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Men 40/59 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Men 60+ | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 240 |
| Subtotal | 180 | 180 | 180 | 180 | 720 |
| Total | 360 | 360 | 360 | 360 | 1440 |

The sample includes 720 men and 720 women and three age groups each totaling 240 individuals: 20 to 39 years; 40 to 59 years; 60 and older. If the geographic factor is taken into account, the sample can be divided up in detail as in Table 1.

Sociological questionnaire

The first task was to construct a pilot questionnaire including several open-ended questions on the Cajun French language and on the cultural identity of the natives of the Cajun triangle. A total of 80 persons from eight parishes answered the questions. From the experience with the pilot questionnaire, a more elaborate questionnaire of 54 questions written in English was constructed. Numerous open-ended questions from the pilot questionnaire were transformed into multiple-choice or yes/no questions by using the responses of the initial respondents. For each question we had an answer labelled ‘other’ to allow the respondent to answer the question in his/her own terms. Thus, the labels which were used in the final version of the questionnaire were those that were given by the initial respondents.

The questions focus on learning and use of the language, respondents’ networks of linguistic contacts, linguistic ability in Cajun French, opinions about the maintenance and use of Cajun French, attitudes about varieties of French (standard French, i.e. the school-taught variety, Creole French, and Cajun French), Cajun identity and the efforts of CODOFIL. The questionnaires were distributed to four types of respondents who are representative of the major linguistic and cultural types in the selected communities:

1. individuals who speak Cajun French fluently and have Cajun French ancestry (parents, grandparents);

2. individuals who can speak some Cajun French, but not fluently, and have Cajun French ancestry (including both 'passive' speakers and 'semi-speakers');
3. individuals who only speak English but who have Cajun ancestry;
4. individuals who only speak English and have no Cajun ancestry.

In each of the communities, a quota of 360 individuals was set, equally distributed among three age groups, women and men, and the four linguistic ability/background categories, i.e. 15 respondents for each of the sampling cells. For almost half the cells the quota of 15 has been filled. A total of 929 out of 1440 questionnaires were administered, coded and entered into a database. The sampling scheme will be completed during another phase of the research, funded by National Science Foundation, but the present database is ample for most analytical purposes, since almost all unfilled categories have at least five respondents each.

The interview strategies

The success of this investigation relied on detailed and precise planning. Information cannot be collected about a minority language which has traditionally been perceived as deviant and whose future is unstable in the same way as it is for languages which are stable and have internal norms (for more details about the methodology, see Dubois 1995, Dubois et al. 1995b).

The research team included fourteen interviewers in addition to the project director. We formed five teams each consisting of one coordinator and two interviewers. During a two-week training period, the investigators familiarized themselves with the questionnaire and learned and practiced strategies of interaction by interviewing the other investigators and the director. All investigators had to be intimately familiar with the questionnaire, to know how to quickly categorize respondents, to use different contact strategies according to a respondent's age and the location of the interview as well as how to deal with refusals. The investigation took place in January and February 1995 during four consecutive weekends Thursday through Sunday.

The majority of the questionnaires were completed by the researchers recording the answers given by the respondents. In some instances, however, it was more practical for the respondent to fill out the questionnaire him/herself, as in the case of the Grand Casino in Marksville where only a few hours were allotted for the 90 or so employees to fill out questionnaires. Even so, the investigator was only supposed to allow a person to fill out the questionnaire by him/herself on the condition that the investigator be present to answer any questions or be in a position to make contact again in case certain questions had been involuntarily omitted. Though a few questionnaires still contain unanswered questions, we were able to reduce their number to a minimum by means of these directives.

Each day, one team stayed within reach of a telephone in order to contact people by telephone who were referred by other respondents as potentially interested or eligible respondents. Although only a secondary method, the use of the telephone during the investigation was an efficient strategy, especially to contact or interview the last remaining respondents of a certain category. As soon as twelve respondents were found in a category out of the fifteen sought (for example twelve fluent women over sixty), the telephone team was in charge of contacting the three remaining respondents, which allowed us to control the compilation of data and to avoid uselessly filling out questionnaires. For several investigators the investigation was their first contact with the Cajun community. During the fieldwork, the team found that the xenophobic attitude towards outsiders often imputed to Cajuns was virtually non-existent in these four communities. The investigators encountered no difficulty in engaging fluent Cajun French speakers in French. The success of the *entrée* into the community can only partly be attributed to careful preparation, to the help of prominent local personalities, and to the socio-linguistic training given to the interviewers. Rather, hospitality, interest and openness seem to be more characteristic of the Cajun community than suspicion or hostility. Although the participation of respondents was almost always positive, the investigators did have to face some refusals. Most people who refused to participate wished us luck; others even furnished the investigators with leads.

The diverse origins and personalities of the investigators proved to be useful rather than a disadvantage in initiating contact with different types of individuals. It allowed us not only to find all types of respondents more easily but also to cover several social sub-groups. The directive given to the investigators was to change category types as often as possible in order to get as wide a representation as possible of the inhabitants of the area (the gay community, Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, etc.). In addition, the investigators had to keep a journal in which they described their own experiences and wrote down remarks and comments collected during the investigation. This proved to be an invaluable tool in synthesizing and comparing the unfolding investigation in each of the towns and also served as an outlet for both the frustration and enthusiasm of the interviewers.

We had three fluent Cajun speaking investigators in our team and all but two of the interviewers were fluent in standard (school-taught) French. Seven out of the fourteen interviewers had Cajun ancestry. The Cajun investigators were responsible for contacting resource persons who in turn were able to bring in other Cajun respondents.

The most important directive to follow during the interview was to adapt to the rhythm of the respondent in order to obtain a reliable interview. Although the anticipated length of the interview was 15 minutes, most contacts lasted 30 minutes, others 45 minutes, and others took an hour and a half. The respondent's age greatly influenced the length of the interview.

Most interviews were conducted in English because of the target groups, but a respectable proportion of interviews with fluent Cajun French speakers, especially the elderly, were conducted in French. By alternating from English to French, the investigators could verify the actual linguistic ability of the respondents. Furthermore, the native-speaker respondents frequently had the investigators take what we called the 'MTPFT' (*Mais Ti Parle Français Toi? But you speak French you?*) test. When an investigator could respond affirmatively, s/he was able to justify his/her incongruous presence, and the quality of the contact between investigator and respondent improved. Very often though, French was no longer used after this point, as the respondents apparently considered the context to be out of their typical domain(s) for using Cajun French.

The LAB predictive index

Two sociolinguistic indices based on responses from the questionnaires have special importance in the analysis of linguistic attitudes: linguistic ability in Cajun French, and Cajun ancestry. In the four communities studied, the diverse influences on Cajun French have resulted in a preponderance of individuals (for the most part under 50 years old) who have limited proficiency in Cajun. They either no longer (or rarely) use their mother tongue, or they were never truly fluent speakers, Cajun not having been their first language and/or not having been used by them extensively. Certain of these individuals can be characterized as 'semi-speakers', i.e. individuals capable of handling and constructing complete sentences, but not capable of actually using the language in all the usual communicative situations. Others among them can be considered as 'near-passive speakers' (Dorian 1981: 107), i.e. individuals capable of recognizing and using certain French words and expressions, but not of constructing complete sentences.

The respondents qualified their own linguistic ability on a scale of ten communicational tasks, as in Table 2. The patterns which emerged very clearly and consistently from the analysis of the data indicated four levels of ability:

1. The respondent checked all ten boxes and/or stated to the interviewer that he/she was capable of doing all ten tasks in Cajun French (fluent speakers).
2. The respondent checked or indicated ability in only the first seven determiners (semi-speakers).
3. The respondent was capable of only the first four or five (passive speakers).
4. The respondent checked zero boxes or reported having no ability to speak Cajun French.

In the study, then, a passive speaker of Cajun is one who can count to ten, name the days of the week, the date and month of the year, and give certain biographical information or produce expressions related to self, family and

Table 2: The ten communicational tasks

| Check in which language(s) you have sufficient competence (enough knowledge) to do the following: | English | Cajun |
|--|---------|-------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I can count to ten 2. I can name the days of the week 3. I can give the date (month and year) 4. I can order a meal in a restaurant 5. I can give biographical information (date of birth, family information, description of your studies) 6. I can speak to people in social situations using appropriate expressions (church, meeting, party, wedding, funeral, etc.) 7. I can describe my hobbies in detail using appropriate vocabulary 8. I can describe my present employment, my studies, and my main social activities in detail with native speakers 9. I can describe what I hope to achieve in the next five years using future tense verbs with native speakers 10. I can give my opinion on a controversial subject (abortion, religion, pollution, nuclear safety) with native speakers | | |

work (e.g. types of fish). A semi-speaker can additionally use Cajun in various social and cultural interactions with the appropriate vocabulary, while still not feeling qualified to talk about hobbies, work, studies, future events, or to discuss abstract subjects with a native (fluent) speaker.

The LAB index (Linguistic Ability and Cajun Background) allows the verification of whether or not Acadian ancestry influences an individual's perceptions. On the cover page of the questionnaire, the respondent was asked about having or acknowledging Cajun ancestors or not (parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.), regardless of linguistic ability. This categorization permits the researchers to better make a distinction between monolinguals having Cajun ancestry from those having none.

The preliminary analytical results as well as our experience in the field have led to the conclusion that the degree of linguistic ability and cultural background constitute the two most important descriptive dimensions of the Cajun communities being investigated. Consequently, these two indices have been combined to form the predictive LAB index. Next, this index was added to the database as an independent factor. The use of this categorization aided in acquiring a much more detailed and exhaustive picture of the socio-linguistic situation of this language variety. The clearly evident differences between the various levels, as shown by the data analysis of the sample, led to the following multidimensional stratification:

1. Cajun French Fluent speakers;
2. Cajun French Semi-speakers;
3. Cajun French Passive speakers;
4. individuals with Cajun background but no Cajun French ability (CB/NCF);
5. individuals with no Cajun background and no Cajun French ability (NCB/NCF).

CONSIDERATIONS OF ETHNICITY IN THE METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the research is a sociolinguistic understanding of Cajun French. The most important aspect of this work is to be the construction of a major corpus of spoken Cajun French, with index and concordance, all available for linguistic research in computer data banks. Experience has shown that this will entail an enormous investment of time and resources, even though the objectives are limited. It is not a sociolinguistic survey of Louisiana, it is not an inventory of all the varieties of French in Louisiana, it will not even attempt to survey exhaustively all the Cajun communities in the state. The first part of this study will help insure that the individuals recorded for the corpus represent the range of fluent Cajun as spoken today. They will be stratified insofar as possible by age, sex and geographical region, validated by their membership in a predominantly Cajun community and in predominantly Cajun networks, and documented by self-reports of ancestry and usage of Cajun French.

In focusing on 'core' members of the community (a choice imposed by the limited number of speakers that can be included in a totally transcribed corpus), questions of the boundaries of the community remain in abeyance, though certain important evidence has emerged from the attitude study. Creole French and standard French (the school-taught variety) are also spoken in Louisiana. Cajun French shares much with these other varieties and there are no doubt a considerable number of speakers whose speech contains elements of two or three varieties. It would be a difficult task to find the natural boundary between the varieties of French that should be classified as Cajun and those that should count as Creole on the one hand, or as closer to an international standard on the other. In addition, any approach to the study of these boundaries is socially and politically highly charged. The historical origins of the Cajun community are found in the Acadian migrations to the Louisiana countryside and those of the Creole community in the Caribbean, ex-slave, colonial, and other groups in Louisiana, so that any present-day distinction between Cajun and Creole inevitably has racial correlates. As Eble (1993: 170) points out 'discussions about Cajun and Creole in southern Louisiana are rarely about language; they are almost always about race.'

Moreover the label ‘Creole’ has always had several meanings in Louisiana. Creole identity has been assigned to immigrants who came to the state prior to its purchase (1803) and their descendants, including German, Irish, Spanish, French, and Acadian individuals. Creole has also been used to refer to the upper-class educated white descendants of French and Spanish settlers, and to the *gens de couleur libres* (free men of color) and their descendants called the *Creoles of color*. This population, which is virtually extinct today, spoke a variety of French called Colonial French and lived in and around New Orleans. In addition, Creole identity came to encompass African slaves from the Senegal basin and their descendants who worked on the plantations of the lower Mississippi valley. Their dialect, Creole French – sometimes called *Neg French*, *Gumbo*, *Vini-couri*, or *Black Patois* – developed during the 17th century through contact between the African slaves and French-speaking Europeans, and was passed on to the French Caribbean African slaves around the last decade of the 18th century.

Sociolinguistic surveys of the type described here could eventually provide an objective resolution of these problems at the linguistic level, but studying all the questions simultaneously within the framework would have far surpassed available resources, competences and interests. However, setting them aside has also led to difficulties. It is clear that some speakers of Cajun have some African-American ancestry. And it is true that there are Creole speakers with some Cajun ancestry, though how many there are and how much Cajun background they have would be difficult to assess. Moreover, there are whites who claim to speak Creole, though they may have no Cajun or Creole ancestry, and the variety they speak may or may not be similar to that of African American speakers. Finally, there are even researchers who claim that there is no real linguistic distinction between Cajun and Creole, but rather it is just an artificial classification based on race. One need not subscribe to this extreme position to understand the hazards of neglecting the ethnic dimension of linguistic differentiation.

The research protocol did not exclude the possibility of finding Cajun speakers of African American origins, even though the four fieldwork sites were chosen according to census data on high concentration of white francophones and individuals having Acadian ancestry. In exploiting contacts with Cajun institutions and Cajun networks, and by frequenting public places in the predominantly Cajun towns, however, only 1 percent of 298 self-reported fluent Cajun speakers seemed to our fieldworkers to be African Americans. As expected, a number of the ‘other’ category on the LAB index are African American. Indeed, to capture the distinction between Cajuns and the historical and cultural majority of American society, the only ethnically-based sampling criterion given to the fieldworkers was not to completely fill their quota of ‘others’ in any given locale with African Americans. This would have been the easiest strategy in certain contexts

where almost every white person had some Cajun ancestry. As a result, around 15 percent of this category consists of African Americans.

What can be made of the virtual absence of African Americans claiming to speak Cajun in the sample? The most likely response is that such individuals make up a tiny minority in the Cajun community. The other possibility is that a non-negligible number of these individuals exist, but do not participate in the Cajun institutions contacted, do not form part of the various Cajun networks tapped, do not frequent the large grocery stores, restaurants, bars and other public places in the town where many respondents were recruited, and do not take part in the Cajun events attended. In other words, they are not active members of the organized Cajun community, nor do they seem connected to this community through informal networks. Since door-to-door canvassing in those residential areas of the towns where Cajun-speaking African Americans might be concentrated was not done, this second scenario remains possible. However, it seems unlikely, since there was no difficulty in finding non-Cajun African Americans in the commercial areas of most towns. In any case, if this scenario is true, the social or geographic barriers responsible for their absence from the sample is an indication that they are peripheral to the Cajun community or that they constitute a separate community, so that special efforts to include them in our sample would be an artificial attempt to insist on a single speech community when there are in fact two. Nevertheless, the first hypothesis, that this category of individuals is very rare, seems the most plausible.

The francophone renaissance in Louisiana has led to a certain degree of fusion of Creole and Cajun traditions in the areas of music, cuisine and cultural celebrations. Whether or not this cultural rapprochement has been occurring at the linguistic level as well, and whether or not there has been a long history of linguistic mixture, is the subject of anecdote (including word lists of uncontrolled provenance), myth, uninformed opinion and wishful thinking. No reliance can be put on unsystematic self-reports to settle the question. A preliminary study (Dubois et al. 1995a) shows increasing confusion about the difference between Cajun and Creole as linguistic knowledge decreases. In fact very little is known or can be known about these matters until there are a number of studies, in different categories of communities, of the type undertaken by this research team. It is clear that historically the Creole and Cajun communities have different origins in ethnically distinct populations and have been concentrated in different geographical areas. For the moment, lacking any solid data to the contrary, the safest working hypothesis is that, on the linguistic level, distinct Creole and Cajun varieties exist, that this distinction reflects at least a residual ethnic correlation, and that the continuum bridging them is sparsely populated. (In 1996 we conducted a similar survey in two representative Creole communities among 240 African-Americans in order to provide answers to these questions. Results are forthcoming.)

RESULTS

The results are based on the responses of 929 respondents (data available thus far on computer). We used StatView as a statistical tool which allowed us to do step-wise multiple regression analyses and cross-tables with two and three variables. In the following section, we present the factors which were significant ($p < .0001$) for selected questions on linguistic attitudes:

- What do you consider yourself? (Cajun, Cajun-American, Franco-American, American, Other)
- In order to be considered a 'true' Cajun, is it necessary to:
 1. speak Cajun French;
 2. have learned Cajun French as your first language;
 3. speak some form of French;
 4. have Cajun ancestors;
 5. have parents or grandparents who speak Cajun French;
 6. live in a Cajun city or town;
 7. live in Louisiana (yes/no).

The LAB index is a strong predictor of respondents' self-image: the more fluent in Cajun French, the more they consider themselves Cajun, as shown in Figure 2. Native speakers and semi-speakers define themselves most often as Cajun, while the largest proportion of passive speakers consider themselves Cajun-American. Cajun-ancestry respondents who do not speak the language tend to think of themselves as American, and this image is even stronger in those with no Cajun background, as might be expected.

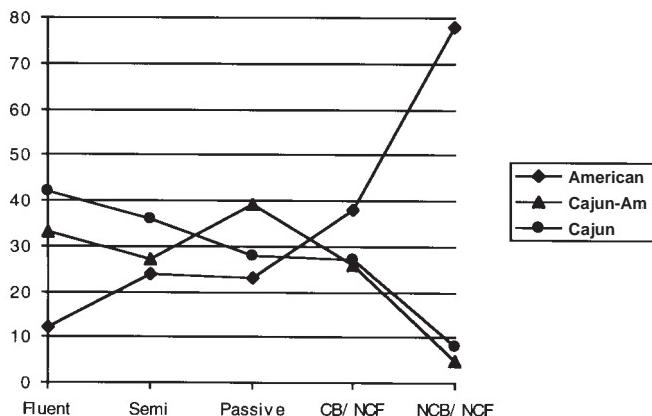


Figure 2: Self-identification vs LAB Index. (N)CB/NCF: (No) Cajun Background, No Cajun French

Table 3: Self-identification vs Linguistic Ability and Cajun Background (LAB) Index and Age ($p < .0001$)

| LAB Index + Age | American | | Cajun-American | | Cajun | | Total |
|---------------------|----------|----|----------------|----|-------|----|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| Young fluent | 6 | 10 | 16 | 27 | 35 | 59 | 59 |
| Middle-aged fluent | 18 | 15 | 49 | 40 | 40 | 33 | 123 |
| Old fluent | 13 | 12 | 32 | 28 | 49 | 42 | 116 |
| Young semi | 7 | 19 | 8 | 22 | 15 | 42 | 36 |
| Middle-aged semi | 14 | 24 | 20 | 34 | 18 | 31 | 59 |
| Old semi | 10 | 30 | 6 | 18 | 13 | 39 | 33 |
| Young passive | 17 | 27 | 29 | 45 | 16 | 25 | 64 |
| Middle-aged passive | 4 | 13 | 12 | 40 | 9 | 30 | 30 |
| Old passive | 6 | 25 | 5 | 21 | 8 | 33 | 24 |
| Young CB/NCF | 36 | 31 | 30 | 26 | 40 | 34 | 117 |
| Middle-aged CB/NCF | 43 | 47 | 23 | 25 | 20 | 22 | 92 |
| Old CB/NCF | 12 | 41 | 9 | 31 | 5 | 17 | 29 |
| Young NCB/NCF | 35 | 70 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 50 |
| Middle-aged NCB/NCF | 35 | 88 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 40 |
| Old NCB/NCF | 44 | 77 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 57 |

Note that for each table presented totals include both non-responses and the Franco-American and Other options, which had very few tokens.

(N)CB/NCF: (No) Cajun Background, No Cajun French.

Table 3 illustrates the combined effects of the LAB index and age. The distinction previously observed between those who can speak Cajun French and those who cannot is still evident. It should be noted, however, that it is the youngest generation of native speakers and semi-speakers who show the strongest Cajun identity, while the middle-aged respondents in the two groups of non-French speakers have the strongest American self-image. Even among the three groups having some proficiency in Cajun French (fluent, semi, passive), it is the middle generation that is the most reluctant to declare itself Cajun. This distinctive behavior can be partially ascribed to the stigmatization of Cajun French in the forties, fifties, and sixties. These individuals reached adulthood during a period when Cajun identity (language and culture) was heavily denigrated, which is no longer the case for those between 20 and 40 years of age. As for the oldest generation, their

Cajun identity was sustained by their relative isolation. Fewer of them had been obliged by economic and demographic forces to live in constant contact with the attitudes of non-Cajuns. Thus it is the middle-aged group which suffered most from the political, cultural and social climate of their youth. The consequences of this are seen in how these individuals perceive themselves. The middle-aged respondents who are native, semi, or passive speakers opt for the 'Cajun-American' compromise. The remaining categories of speakers, those with no ability in Cajun French, have a strong tendency to define themselves as American.

Social class was not a criterion in stratifying the sample, therefore an equal sample from each social class was not obtained as it was for age, sex and the LAB index. Nevertheless class data were obtained through the questionnaire sections on profession and education. The discussion below is based only on the occupational data. Respondents were classified into four socio-professional (SP) levels:

1. professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.) constituting 15% of the sample;
2. white collar workers (administrative assistants, registered nurses, teachers, etc.), 56%;
3. blue collar workers (plumbers, skilled factor workers, etc.), 23%;
4. laborers (waiters and waitresses, garbagemen, unskilled office personnel, etc.), 5%.

One percent did not provide occupational data. When cross-tabulated with the LAB index, all possible LAB/socio-professional combinations were represented, though there was a tendency for certain LAB scores to be associated more with one or two occupational groups, eg. 50 percent of the professionals are fluent speakers.

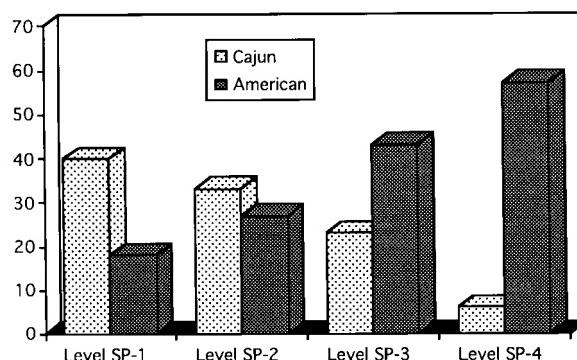


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who self-identify as Cajuns and American vs Socio-Professional class. Level 1 corresponds to high SP class; level 4 indicates low SP class

As mentioned, Dormon has claimed that the Cajun ethnogenesis and the maintenance of Cajun identity must be understood in terms of class distinctions. The socio-professional level and the answers to the self-identification question were first tabulated in order to test whether socio-professional level (closely related to most stratification notions of class) conditions the self-perception of respondents as Cajun, and in consequence can play a role in circumscribing the Cajun community. As Figure 3 shows, socio-professional class does indeed influence self-identification, but in the opposite direction to what Dormon postulated. Note that for clarity we have depicted only the two polar responses to the self-identification question, which accounts for a large majority of the respondents. There is a clear tendency ($p < .0001$) for the higher socio-professional classes (levels 1 and 2) to have higher Cajun identification, and for the lower classes (levels 3 and 4) to identify themselves as American. This contrasts with Dormon's thesis that 'ordinary Cajuns', rather than 'genteel Cajuns' (a dichotomy based on economic success), are responsible for the maintenance of the Cajun community. These results also suggest that this class tendency, if it ever existed, has been completely overturned as a consequence of the changes that the 20th century has wrought within the modern Cajun community.

When the data were analyzed using cross-tables with three variables, it was found that the effects of higher class in favoring Cajun self-identity are valid across all LAB categories. The socio-economic effect and the background-and-ability factors act in an independent and additive way in determining self-identity. Contrary to what was hypothesized, socio-economic class does have an influence on Cajun self-identification.

Table 4 displays the results on the seven criteria for identifying a 'real' Cajun. The qualification agreed upon by the largest number of respondents

Table 4: Frequency distribution of questions on Cajun identity

| In order to be considered a true Cajun, it is necessary . . . | Yes | | No | | Total |
|--|-----|----|-----|----|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | |
| To have Cajun ancestors | 738 | 80 | 183 | 20 | 921 |
| To have parents/grandparents who speak CF | 624 | 67 | 304 | 33 | 928 |
| To speak some form of French | 517 | 56 | 408 | 44 | 925 |
| To speak Cajun French | 384 | 41 | 542 | 58 | 926 |
| To live in Louisiana | 335 | 36 | 591 | 64 | 926 |
| To live in a Cajun city or town | 248 | 28 | 697 | 73 | 927 |
| To have learned CF as your first language | 207 | 22 | 720 | 78 | 927 |

Table 5: Self-identification vs LAB Index

| In order to be considered a true Cajun, it is necessary . . . | Fluent | | Semi | | Passive | | CB/NCF | | NCB/NCF | |
|---|--------|-----|------|-----|---------|-----|--------|-----|---------|-----|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| To have Cajun ancestors | 225 | 76 | 106 | 82 | 99 | 84 | 203 | 85 | 105 | 71 |
| To have parents or grand- parents who speak CF | 211 | 71 | 87 | 68 | 81 | 69 | 167 | 70 | 78 | 53 |
| To speak some form of French | 185 | 62 | 73 | 57 | 68 | 58 | 114 | 50 | 77 | 52 |
| To speak Cajun French | 150 | 50 | 55 | 43 | 40 | 34 | 81 | 34 | 58 | 40 |
| To live in Louisiana | 101 | 34 | 48 | 38 | 48 | 40 | 90 | 38 | 48 | 33 |
| To live in a Cajun city or town | 87 | 29 | 37 | 29 | 32 | 27 | 60 | 25 | 32 | 22 |
| To have learned CF as your first language | 88 | 30 | 31 | 24 | 21 | 18 | 36 | 15 | 31 | 21 |
| Total | 298 | 100 | 128 | 100 | 118 | 100 | 238 | 100 | 147 | 100 |

(80%) is to have Cajun ancestry, followed by the language (Cajun French) spoken by parents or grandparents (67%). The third requirement for a majority (56%) is to speak some French, without restriction as to variety or level of ability. The other four criteria are seen as necessary only by a minority of respondents. Speaking Cajun French oneself (41%), living in Louisiana (36%), or living in a Cajun community (28%) are not cited by as many respondents as the first three criteria. And the criterion least frequently seen as a necessity (22%) is to have Cajun French as one's mother tongue. The respondents thus recognize the ongoing loss of the Cajun language in Louisiana and accommodate their definition of Cajun identity accordingly.

In Table 5, it can be seen how this pattern of responses is conditioned by respondents' LAB index. In general, the tendency which can be discerned is for the respondents to identify as 'necessary' just those criteria they themselves satisfy. Thus, for the two most important criteria, Cajun ancestry and Cajun French-speaking parents or grandparents, there is a clear distinction between those with Cajun background and those without. To speak Cajun French, to speak some form of French, or to have learned Cajun French as one's first language is seen as essential most often by fluent speakers, then by semi-speakers, then by the passive category, and least often by individuals of Cajun ancestry with no ability in French. Indeed, the latter category of 'Cajun-ancestry alone' speakers cite all of these linguistic criteria (which

they themselves fail) less often than respondents with no Cajun background at all, who presumably have little or no personal stake in community membership. The two criteria having to do with residence, in Louisiana in general or in a Cajun community, are only slightly influenced by respondents' LAB index.

DISCUSSION

The results on respondents' self-identification indicate that even though 'Cajun' is in style, only specific types of respondents will identify themselves as Cajun. The results also indicate the superficiality of the common usage of the term 'Cajun', due probably to its indiscriminate use by outsiders, largely for commercial exploitation. Since the most important criterion for Cajun identity is ancestry, almost 75 percent of the respondents in our sample would be justified in calling themselves Cajun. We know, however, that only 30 percent of them do. Self-identification is ultimately linked to ability in Cajun French for all age groups: the greater one's access to the Cajun language, the more likely one is to identify oneself as Cajun. This confirms that the notion of a Cajun speech community remains valid despite the precarious state of the language in Louisiana.

Self-identification and social effects

The younger individuals in each socio-professional class in our sample clearly have a greater tendency than their elders to identify themselves as Cajun. Respondents aged 40 to 60 are the most reluctant to consider themselves Cajun, whether or not they speak Cajun French, and whether or not they are of Cajun ancestry. Moreover it is precisely those individuals who rate high on the socio-professional scale in each age group who are the torch-bearers of Cajun identity. How can we interpret this from the points of view of the socio-cultural history of the community and the French revival movement?

The social class effect can be explained by the traditional link between the 'elite' and CODOFIL; both groups have, as previously noted, promoted French cultural heritage. Nonetheless CODOFIL's choice of standard French for teaching insulted or alienated a considerable segment of the population, since this effectively downgraded their own variety. Only recently have immersion programs in Cajun French been offered in a few elementary schools. To this day, many Cajuns view CODOFIL and state-sponsored cultural activity with suspicion, wary and resentful of the agenda of the cultural 'elite' (Brown 1993).

Moreover, as Ancelet points out, 'despite its relative success on legal and political fronts, CODOFIL consistently found itself frustrated in its attempts to generate grass-roots support among Cajuns' (Ancelet 1988: 346). This

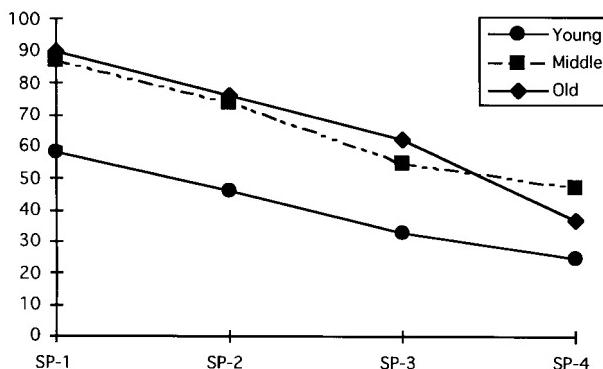


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who know CODOFIL divided by Socio-Professional class and age group. SP-1: High level; SP-4: Low level

inability to establish broad-based support among Cajuns in general, and to reach the middle and lower classes in particular, is shown by our results. Only 54 percent of the respondents indicate knowledge of CODOFIL when asked about this organization. The responses given tend to fall along the class continuum, as Figure 4 shows. Knowledge of CODOFIL increases in direct correlation to socio-professional class in all age groups. People who indicate that they have heard of CODOFIL are likely to be part of the 'elite'.

The tendency among the young respondents to identify themselves as Cajuns more than their elders could not be explained by the impact of CODOFIL on French culture, although they constitute the generation that has had easier access to French through the medium of the schools and has benefited from the new cultural recognition of their ethnic group. We found that 61 percent of the younger respondents have never heard of the organization (the most common answer being 'CODO-who?' even when the investigators explained what it is). This compared to 38 percent of older respondents. From Figure 4, we can see that a majority of the young lower class individuals (75%) have not heard of the organization.

The Cajun identity claimed by the young respondents could be attributed more to the recent economic rise of the Cajun population. Parallel to their assimilation into mainstream American culture, including the loss of their language and changes in their lifestyle, the majority of Cajuns and their children (especially the 20–39 year old group) have moved up the socioeconomic ladder. They no longer constitute a socioeconomically disadvantaged group. Our data show that it is the respondents without Cajun French ability and Cajun background who tend to be of lower socio-professional class (Level 1 8%; Level 2 52%; Level 3 32%; Level 4 8%). By comparison the fluent Cajun French speakers tend to have higher socio-professional class (Level 1 24%; Level 2 53%; Level 3 19%; Level 4 3%). Socio-economic security

engenders favorable attitudes from Cajuns and non-Cajuns towards Cajun identity. This, together with the fact that Cajun culture has acquired a definite cachet, means that as far as the younger group of respondents is concerned, to admit or even to flaunt this identity no longer has the negative social or economic connotations experienced by the previous generations. Rather than having to hide or disguise Cajun identity, the younger generation takes pride in its heritage and the stigmatization attached to the label 'Cajun' has greatly diminished.

It can be observed as well that there is a compromise position on self-identity – the Cajun-American identity – which seems completely neglected in the literature. It is the passive bilinguals and, more particularly, the middle-aged respondents (fluent, semi, and passive) who are most comfortable with this label. The respondents who cannot speak any Cajun French but have Cajun ancestry tend, as do those without Cajun background, to see themselves as American. The middle generation (40–60) of those with Cajun ancestry can be characterized as 'lame' Cajuns, to borrow Labov's terminology (1972a). On one hand, they tend to be highly assimilated due to socio-economic and cultural pressures and a linguistic policy favoring English. On the other hand, because of the renaissance of Cajun culture supported by, and benefiting, their younger counterparts, this middle generation is the target of resentment from the younger members of the community, with complaints frequently voiced to the interviewers in the field. The younger respondents tend to blame the middle generation for not having transmitted the Cajun language and for having encouraged them to assimilate to mainstream American culture.

The first hypothesis given in this paper concerned the emergence of two different conceptualizations of the Cajun community: a speech community, or a cultural community for which the Cajun language would be a desirable, but not essential, aspect. Our results confirm this to a large extent. The results obtained acknowledge the notion of a speech community which – while still implicitly inferable in a clear way from the self-identification of core members – is not well-defined by the explicit membership criteria accepted by the respondents. On the other hand, there is certainly a vision of a cultural com-

| Cajun | Cajun-American | American |
|---|----------------|-------------------------------|
| More linguistic ability in CF >>>>>>>>> | | Less linguistic ability in CF |
| Younger respondents >>>>>>>>>>>>>>> | | Older respondents |
| Higher SP level >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> | | Lower SP level |

Figure 5: Cajun self-identification tendencies

munity based on ancestry. However, it is precisely those individuals who are in a higher social class and the young respondents, regardless of their position on the LAB index, who most strongly support this notion of a cultural community, as indicated in Figure 5.

The 'true' Cajun

The results obtained on the attributes necessary to be considered a 'true' Cajun are shown in Figure 6. The first distinction which can be noted is between the attributes judged necessary by a majority of respondents, and those required by only a minority. Given the relative importance of the language as a criterion for self-identification, one would have hypothesized it to be one of the necessary attributes for identifying others as being 'true' Cajuns. But even though the ability of one's parents or grandparents to speak Cajun is considered a necessary criterion by Cajun speakers (fluent, semi-speakers and passive bilinguals), Cajun French as a mother tongue – which is an essential element for the maintenance of a language – is only considered a minor, optional component of Cajun identity.

Additionally, 5 percent of the respondents recognize as Cajun only those having all the attributes, while at the other extreme, 6 percent did not insist on any attributes as necessary. It was some of the oldest respondents, independent of their LAB index scores, who indicated that a true Cajun should have all of the characteristics formerly applicable to the Cajun community as a whole: mother tongue, ancestry, parents, territory, town, etc. In contrast a few, largely younger respondents felt that the notion of a Cajun community consisted only of such abstractions as *la joie de vivre*. Though the number of individuals in this group was too small to analyze statistically, it seems to contain a preponderance of young Cajun respondents with no Cajun French ability.

A second hypothesis was that an individual's definition of a 'true' Cajun would be conditioned by that individual's socio-cultural characteristics. The results also confirm this hypothesis: the LAB index significantly influences respondents' definitions of the Cajun community. Even though

| Attributes required by a majority | Attributes not required by a majority |
|--|---|
| Cajun ancestors Parents/grandparents with CF Speak some form of French | To speak Cajun Live in Louisiana Live in a Cajun town CF as first language |

Figure 6: List of attributes required and not required by a majority of respondents

| Fluent | Semi/Passive | CB/NCF | NCB/NCF |
|--|---|--|-----------------|
| Cajun ancestors Parents/GPs with CF Some form of French Speaks CF | Cajun ancestors Parents/GPs with CF Some form of French | Cajun ancestors Parents/GPs with CF | Cajun ancestors |

Figure 7: Self-identification and definition of what makes a 'true' Cajun (N)CB/NCF: (No) Cajun Background, No Cajun French

ancestry is considered the *sine qua non* of Cajun identity by all LAB categories, the greater an individual's ability in Cajun French, the more that individual is likely to emphasize the linguistic criteria as important, first with respect to parents and grandparents, then with regard to one's own knowledge of some type of French, and ultimately competence in Cajun French (Figure 7).

It is remarkable that, with the exception of those respondents with neither Cajun background nor Cajun language ability, the dominant description of a true Cajun given by respondents in each LAB category is one which fits members of that category, but tends to exclude those further down on the LAB scale. By definition, only the fluent speakers satisfy the criterion of Cajun French fluency, compared to the semi-speakers and passive bilinguals who only know a bit of French (Cajun or another variety). The respondents with Cajun background but no Cajun French ability generally satisfy only the criterion of Cajun ancestry and having parents/grandparents capable of speaking Cajun French. As for those with neither Cajun background nor any Cajun French ability, they are aware that the only criterion that distinguishes them from all members of the Cajun community is that of Cajun ancestry. As outsiders, relatively knowledgeable about the community by virtue of residence within it but having little personal stake in the entire issue of Cajun identity, they emerge as having the most objective assessment of the sociolinguistic reality of the Cajuns.

Self-identification and the definition of what makes a 'true' Cajun seem to be strongly related. It is likely that the definition of a 'true' Cajun given by a respondent will influence her or his self-identification, and vice versa. It has been shown that Cajun ancestry is by far the most important definitional criterion of the Cajun community according to all groups of respondents. Logically everyone with Cajun ancestors having parents/grandparents who spoke Cajun French could identify themselves as Cajuns, including the fluent speakers, the semi-speakers, the passive speakers and the speakers with Cajun background but no Cajun French.

The fluent speakers and the semi-speakers both exhibit perfect correspondence: their definition of a true Cajun corresponds to their own characteris-

tics and they generally identify themselves as Cajun. The passive bilinguals, on the other hand, even if they satisfy their definition of a 'true' Cajun, identify themselves as Cajun-American. Those with only Cajun background are the most inconsistent: despite their definition of Cajun which they themselves satisfy, they tend to identify strongly as American. These results suggest a relatively high degree of sociolinguistic security of the fluent and semi-speaker groups within their community due to their linguistic abilities, and relative insecurity among the passive bilinguals and, especially, the respondents with only Cajun background.

Speaking Cajun French is not the most frequently cited criterion among the fluent speakers, even if it is in this group that it is the most widespread. One might imagine that these speakers are adjusting to the decline of the language and wish their unilingual children to be considered Cajun (Trudgill 1983 found a similar pattern within the Albanian community in Greece). The individuals with only Cajun background are aware that the fluent speakers (and to a lesser degree the semi-speakers) are the remaining custodians of the Cajun language and that they would be justified in insisting on this component as a necessary attribute of a 'true' Cajun. Since this group (and to a lesser degree the passive bilinguals) acknowledge that they lack competence in CF, many of them refrain from explicitly claiming that they are Cajun, although this claim is implicit in their definition of the Cajun community, which includes themselves.

If the above interpretation of the passive bilinguals and individuals with only Cajun background is correct, this means that there is a degree of linguistic insecurity other than that deriving from the contact between English and French, the Anglo-Americans on one side and the Cajuns of Cajun ancestry on the other. The results would support the existence of a socio-cultural stigmatization related to self-identification whose principal victims are firstly the respondents of Cajun ancestry, from 40 to 60 years of age, who prefer to distinguish themselves both from the preceding generation and the following one. Secondly, there are the respondents with Cajun background but no Cajun French linguistic ability who are distinguished from Cajuns who speak Cajun French fluently or almost fluently. The following extract, copied verbatim from a poster written and displayed in a musical instrument shop in one town investigated, perfectly illustrates this kind of stigmatization.

So you tell me that you can't speak French even though you have lived in a French-speaking area all your life. You say you never learned how because no one ever showed you. Yet somehow you managed to become a normal, stereotype, clone of 'Anywhere U.S.A.' even though no one ever showed you that either. BULLSHIT! I'll tell you why you can't speak French. It's because, as you were growing up you were too busy pursuing mundane trivia and making fun of those who did speak French that you could never find time to recognize the beauty of your heritage. You turned your back on a hot bowl of Gumbo in favor of a cola and a tasteless

American hot-dog. Now that Cajun culture attracts world-wide attention you have decided to be Cajun also. That's fine but don't make a second mistake and try to take credit away from the people who kept the torch lit when Cajun was a dirty word. I pledge myself to not let that happen (December 1987).

CONCLUSION

This work contributes to an understanding of the extent to which the Cajun community constitutes a collectivity distinct from Anglo-American society. Our results summarized in Figure 8 show that the Cajun community can be divided into three levels from the linguistic point of view. In addition, social factors (age and socio-professional level) play a role in shaping its boundaries:

- At the first level there is a cultural community based on ancestry in which there is an interest in the preservation of Francophone heritage, but in which some members no longer speak the language and consider it a minor aspect of identity.

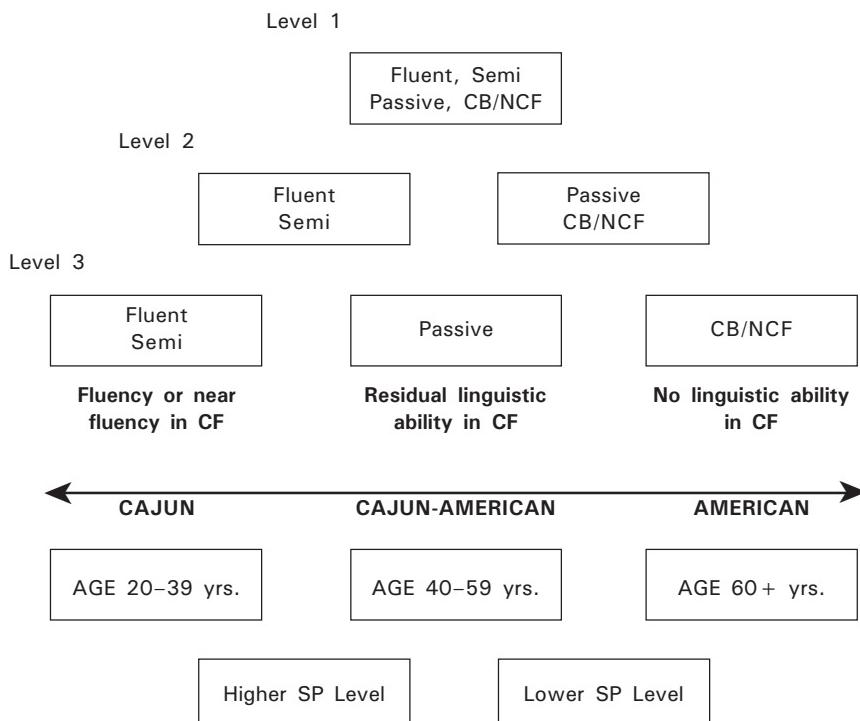


Figure 8: The sociolinguistic dimensions of the Cajun community

- The second level can be divided into two communities according to their linguistic ability in Cajun French. The first corresponds to the definition of a speech community and includes fluent and semi-speakers who share similar attitudes. The second is comprised of all the members who do not speak Cajun French fluently or near fluently, but have Cajun ancestry.
- The third level in Figure 8 can be subdivided into three categories based on both the loss of Cajun French and whether the members consider themselves distinct from or similar to the mainstream American society. Fluent and semi-speakers who self-identify as Cajun regardless of social class comprise the first group. The second contains members who have residual linguistic ability in Cajun French and who consider themselves as Cajun-Americans. The third consists of those members with Cajun ancestry who have no linguistic ability in Cajun French and who consider themselves as American.
- Cajun self-identification is conditioned by age and class (Figure 8, bottom). The youngest and those on the higher end of the socio-professional scale tend to identify themselves as Cajun, whereas the oldest and the respondents on the lower socio-professional level tend to call themselves American, regardless of their linguistic ability in Cajun French.

These results demonstrate well-delineated linguistic and social sub-groups in the Cajun population which are emerging from contrasting perceptions of their own identity and the image of the Cajun community in Louisiana. The snapshot of the community revealed by our survey shows a polarization of linguistic versus cultural criteria for identity and membership, according to linguistic competence. The demographic and socioeconomic correlates, however, assure us that this configuration is dynamic and that the emergent cultural community will view itself in a very different way.

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